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070808Z Aug 03

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004965

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STATE FOR NEA/RA LAWSON, OES/PCI PAYNE, OES/ENV RICHARD
STATE PASS USAID EGAT WILSON
STATE PASS USEPA, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

E.O. 12598: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PROMISES JORDAN CONTINUING SUPPORT ON
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In an introductory call on the new Minister of Environment, Dr. Hisham Gharaibeh, the Ambassador gave his assurances that the U.S. would continue to support Jordan's environmental objectives. Among these, both agreed that building the country's environmental management capacity and supporting projects and activities that would enhance the new ministry's regulatory and enforcement capabilities rank highly. The Ambassador urged Gharaibeh to focus with the Minister of Industry and Trade on the timing and agenda of the proposed Joint Environmental Forum. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) In an August 5 courtesy call on the new Minister of Environment, Dr. Hisham Gharaibeh, the Ambassador acknowledged the challenges that lay ahead for Jordan to protect its environment. He reassured Gharaibeh that the U.S. would continue its active engagement on environmental issues, including funding not only the larger infrastructure projects, such as water and wastewater treatment plants, but also smaller technical assistance and training activities. Gharaibeh was grateful for the ongoing U.S. support, but repeatedly raised Jordan's desire for additional assistance in this sector. "We'll count on you," he said. The minister added that one of the greatest challenges he faces will be to carve out the new ministry's domain and relationship with potentially competing ministries, such as Water and Irrigation, Health, and Agriculture.

3. (SBU) Turning to the Joint Environmental Forum, the Ambassador explained the background of this FTA commitment to Gharaibeh and encouraged him to coordinate closely with the new Minister of Industry and Trade, Mohammad Abu Hammour, to identify an appropriate time and develop the agenda for the event. Gharaibeh, thinking aloud, suggested that October may represent an opportunity to host the event, but promised to check with his Industry and Trade counterpart to reconfirm. The Ambassador impressed upon the minister the importance of this bilateral environmental dialog, noting that the Jordan FTA was the first such agreement to introduce an environmental element and Washington policymakers were keen to follow its progress.

4. (SBU) The USAID Acting Mission Director and Water Resources and Environment Officer briefed Gharaibeh on environmental projects that USAID is supporting in Jordan. Notable among these are medical waste management, hazardous waste management, reclaimed water reuse in agricultural and industrial applications, rehabilitation of a phosphate mine, and broad public awareness campaigns. The NEA Regional Environment Officer added that an upcoming EPA-facilitated multilateral (Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli) training activity on hazardous waste management complements USAID's objective and helps to build the capacity of his ministry's personnel. Gharaibeh was appreciative of the U.S. assistance on hazardous waste and lamented the state of the Suwaqa hazardous waste site, a quasi-white elephant of a facility in the remote Jordan desert. While some of the basic infrastructure is in place, he related, Suwaqa requires significant capital investment (including the incinerators) and a management plan to make it operational.

5. (SBU) When asked about his priorities for the Ministry of Environment, Gharaibeh told us he would be aggressively seeking international donor funding, as his budget is quite small. Recognizing his limited resources, he hopes to create public/private partnerships to work on pressing environmental issues. Developing better working relationships with complementary ministries, such as Health, Water and Irrigation, and Agriculture, are also high on his agenda. Gharaibeh noted that for years, without an environmental entity of cabinet status, other ministries had "poached" many of the issues that "rightfully belong" to the Ministry of Environment and he needed to better define the new lines of responsibility. The laws are clear, he said, but enforcement and implementation are weak.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador told Gharaibeh that we hoped to recruit an EPA official to come to Jordan for several months to assist the Ministry of Environment in developing the most efficient and effective organizational structure to confront the environmental issues particular to Jordan. Gharaibeh noted that the proposed organizational structure assessment may need a specialized contractor to be able to do a thorough and in-depth job.

17. (SBU) BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON HISHAM GHARAIBEH. Until his appointment as Minister of Environment at the end of July, Dr. Hisham Gharaibeh served as Vice President of Yarmouk University, Jordan, since 2000. Prior to that he was a professor at the Department of Finance and Banking at Yarmouk University from 1979-2000. Gharaibeh has also worked as the Head of the Consultancy Department at the Arab Organization for Administrative Development (League of Arab States) from 1987-1991, in addition to doing consulting for several Arab and international organizations, such as the IMF. While his experience in matters of environmental affairs is arguably limited, his extensive managerial background may help the nascent ministry to develop the proper infrastructure and recruit the most qualified personnel. Gharaibeh was born in Irbid in 1948. He holds a BSc in Commerce from the University of Alexandria, Egypt, an MBA from the University of Dallas, Texas, and a PhD in Financial Management from the University of Texas. He was a teaching assistant at the University of Texas from 1975-1979.

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